The Spectre and the Stage: Reading and Ethics at the Intersection of Psychoanalysis, the neo-Victorian, and the Gothic[1]

Jessica Gildersleeve

> No crypt presents itself. The grounds are so disposed as to disguise and to hide: something, always a body in some way. But also to disguise the act of hiding and to hide the disguise: the crypt hides as it holds. – Jacques Derrida
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> ... *why* had the Dead just now, just recently, with such persistence, chosen to try to break back into the land of the living with raps, taps, messages, emanations, materialisations, spirit-flowers and travelling bookshelves? – A.S. Byatt

Studies of both Victorian and contemporary literature and culture have become increasingly anxious about the emergence of neo-Victorian writing, and about their own position in relation to it. Rohan McWilliam, for example, begins his essay on the genre and its pervasiveness in twenty-first-century Victorian studies by asserting that "A spectre is haunting the world of Victorian Studies: the spectre of neo-Victorianism" (106). Cora Kaplan, in a similar way, argues that our fascination with "Victoriana" is a model of "history out of place", and suggests that it there is "something atemporal and almost spooky in its effects" (6). Patricia Pulham and Rosario Arias, in a study entirely focused on spectrality in neo-Victorian fiction, explain that "Victorianism" is best understood in contemporary fiction "as a revenant or a ghostly visitor from the past" ("Introduction" xv). The "neo-Victorian turn" may be used to describe the plethora of historical fiction, or historiographic metafiction, which has emerged in the past few decades, and which self-consciously deals with the Victorian period as setting and symbol.[2] These works by McWilliam, Kaplan, and Pulham and Arias represent just three instances of many in which that neo-Victorian turn is represented in terms of a haunting of contemporary culture.[3] The metaphor is particularly useful because, as Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben point out, it "gothically suggest[s] that the bygone is never bygone and … the whole point of postmodernist art is to problematize the pastness of the past and the deadness of the dead" ("(Mis)Shapes of Neo-Victorian Gothic" 38). The present study seeks to develop this critical interest in the ways in which the Victorian period haunts our own by exploring the origins of what Kohlke and Gutleben have recognised, as well as its implications for literary studies beyond the neo-Victorian focus. In order to do this, this article makes two main arguments. I will propose that the emphasis on the ways in which the past returns to haunt permits a reading of the psychoanalytic discourse of trauma as a mode of neo-Victorian Gothic writing. Recognising the similarities between these two genres, I argue, allows us to see not just how the spectre can be used to explain neo-Victorianism's postmodernity and its relation to the past, as has already been discussed in the extant criticism, but how we might use neo-Victorian fiction as a model for developing trauma theory and the ethics of representing traumatic memory and history.

The neo-Victorian turn in contemporary fiction has been explained in a number of ways. It has been recognised as a means of negotiating social problems and cultural difference through processes of rewriting, revising, or reimagining oppressive and marginalising activities of the past.[4] Nevertheless, the reason for a return to the Victorian period, in particular, remains. As Justin Sausman puts it, why should "the present moment … see a

return to the traumas of the nineteenth century?" (121) Or, in Mark Llewellyn's terms, considering the innovation and development of the Romantic and Modern periods which bookend the Victorian, "At the height of our (post)modernity, why do we continually mark and stage a return to a period that was caught between two 'bigger' notions?" (167) Several critics have proposed responses to this question. It would of course be a mistake, as Gutleben points out, to see the relationship between the postmodern neo-Victorian and the Victorian "proper" as simply one of "filial piety" or "any form of straightforward homage" (7), since it plays with and critiques our sense of who or what the Victorians precisely were. John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), for instance, includes three different conclusions to the story, and the narrator frequently interrupts the narrative to lament the difficulty of controlling (or truly knowing) his characters. The playfulness of neo-Victorian writing also offers some historical freedom. Sarah Waters, for example, notes that the fictionalisation of "fragmented" or "contested histories" in novels such as *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) and *Fingersmith* (2002) means that "I'm in charge": "If I want my lesbians in the 1860s to have sex, then they just do" (qtd. in Kaye Mitchell 136). Louisa Hadley thus proposes that our fascination with the Victorians is a product both of "their strangeness and the discontinuities between the present and the past" as well as "their familiarity and the continuities between the present and the past" (8). The Victorians are both like and not like us, so that in A.S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990), for example, the romantic relationships in the past and the present are mirrored, but ultimately shown to be products of their historical contexts.

For McWilliam, on the other hand, neo-Victorian literature testifies to the sense in which the Victorian period can help us understand our own: "neo-Victorianism has the effect of reintroducing us to the Victorians and reclaiming their relevance in a new century …. Modern nightmares remain Victorian nightmares" (107). Maciej Sulmicki makes the similar point that, "If one … wants to see the problems of the present from a distance, there appear to be two solutions. One is to wait until contemporary affairs become matters of the past and the other is to search for similar problems in previous times" (150). For Kohlke, too, neo-Victorian texts are best understood in terms of "the insights they afford into twentieth- and twenty-first century cultural history and socio-political concerns" (13). These readings situate the neo-Victorian appropriation of the Victorian past as a kind of return of the repressed, suggesting that such narratives constitute a compulsive return to the origins of our contemporary trauma as we seek to solve that which we saw or knew too late. It "masks", argue Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, "nothing less than our own awareness of belatedness" (4). In novels like Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and Lloyd Jones' *Mister Pip* (2006), this is motivated by a postcolonial desire to revise what are seen to be the errors of the past. By rewriting canonical texts which model and disseminate the attitudes of colonial oppression, Rhys and Jones explicitly seek to counter the discursive influence of the precursor novels, bearing witness to some of those voices lost to, or marginalised by, the grand historical narrative.

In other respects, it has been suggested that the vogue for the neo-Victorian finds its source in nostalgia and simplification: a desire to "[think] through where we came from" (Llewellyn 171), even if that is based on a romanticised version of the past. The neo-Victorian is often less concerned with the "truth" of the Victorian era than with its simulacra: it is a "stage-set, already mythicized by its own extravagant fictions" (Waters qtd. in Letissier 35). What Kate Flint calls "period fetishism" (230) and Kaplan calls "Victoriana", or what we might more broadly categorise as an interest in adornment, can take the form of "corsets and things" (Waters qtd. in Dennis 45) in steampunk fashion, the financial and cultural value placed on

"period features" such as moulding and fireplaces in British homes, and the popularity of contemporary film and television programs such as the pastiche permutations of *Sherlock Holmes* (including the Guy Ritchie films [2009, 2011], the BBC television series, *Sherlock* [2010-present], and the CBS television series, *Elementary* [2012-present]). In all of these cases, it is the idea of the Victorians on which value is placed, rather than what the Victorians and the Victorian period were actually like. The period is framed, in a sense, by embellishment and adornment; in much the same way as Victorian crypts were often highly decorative, the neo-Victorian in literature and culture is often constituted by disguise and distraction. In these examples, it becomes a way to avoid looking at the corpse, as it were, working "to disguise the act of hiding and to hide the disguise" (Derrida xiv), rather than constituting a more linear or historical return.

We must pay attention to the sense in which neo-Victorian fiction does not constitute a desire to remember the past so much as to respond to it, to "establish … a dual relationship" (Pulham and Arias xx) and "creat[e] a dialogue" (Kirchknopf 6) between the Victorian period and our own, which permits us to unlock "occluded secrets, silences and mysteries" (Pulham and Arias xx) and "supply different perspectives" (Kirchknopf 6). However, this theorisation of the neo-Victorian approach to the past is problematic. If neo-Victorian fiction is concerned to attend to the marginalised voices of history and, at the same time, to romanticise that past, then the "dialogue" it establishes between the Victorian period and our own contains an ethical dilemma in which we are not listening to the originary trauma, the "occluded secrets", but to what occludes it: a "stage-set." We are made subject to what Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok call the phantom, who is a liar. Colin Davis confirms: "its effects are designed to mislead the haunted subject and to ensure that its secret remains shrouded in mystery" (374).

Kate Mitchell has recently claimed that neo-Victorian writing makes a contribution "to the way we remember the nineteenth-century past in ways that resist privileging history's non-fictional discourse, on the one hand, and postmodernism's problematization of representation on the other" (4). This article responds to that discussion by suggesting that the metafictionality of neo-Victorian fiction and its self-conscious construction of history as narrative puts into action precisely the means by which traumatic memories and histories work. I disagree with the suggestion that it comes to "preserve the past while always underscoring that we can never know it prior to its transformation into narrative" (Shiller 541), or that it represents the "ethical imperative of 'working through'" trauma (Kohlke and Gutleben, "(Mis)Shapes of Neo-Victorian Gothic" 4). Instead, I argue that neo-Victorian writing demonstrates the means by which we can attend "to the ghost as an ethical injunction", ensuring that we respect and preserve its Otherness (Davis 373).

Psychoanalysis as Neo-Victorian Gothic

Waters typically is acknowledged as one of the most active and important neo-Victorian writers, since her first three novels (*Tipping the Velvet*, *Affinity* [1999], and *Fingersmith*) readily fall into this category, and constitute a significant touchstone for critical discourse about the genre. Her reading of the neo-Victorian turn is therefore of use in our understanding of its aims and concerns. For Waters, the Victorian period is indeed a "stage-set", or "a sort of psychological landscape" (qtd. in Dennis 45), rather than a realist one, and her recognition of this provides a useful means of approaching important interpretative concepts about neo-Victorian writing. When Abigail Dennis asked Waters about her interest in the Victorian period, Waters tellingly responded:"it seems to me that there is something about those nineteenth-century novels and their social contexts that lends itself to a Gothic landscape, a

Gothic interpretation, which for me has been really fruitful …. [S]ome writers respond to the Gothic, what they perceive of as the Gothic in the nineteenth century" (qtd. in Dennis 45). Waters' slippage from the Victorian to the Gothic implicitly acknowledges the attraction to a specific Victorian mode, that is, the Gothic, which can tell us much about neo-Victorian approaches to the past. From Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, to Byatt's *Angels and Insects* (1992), and Waters' own *Affinity*, neo-Victorian fiction has gained a reputation for its Gothic modes of response. *Wide Sargasso Sea* recasts Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) as a narrative of Gothic imprisonment in both physical and psychological terms. "The Conjugial Angel", from Byatt's *Angels and Insects*, uses the longing and mourning of Tennyson's "In Memoriam" (1849) as a model for a narrative about the spiritualist movement in Victorian England, so that the mediums, through their favoured means of spirit communication (automatic writing), work as figures for the neo-Victorian author. *Affinity* also engages with Victorian spiritualism, using it as a means of thinking about the relative freedom or imprisonment of the human soul. Each of these narratives adopts the tropes of the Gothic to engage with the Victorian past, and to convey these as a means of permitting its haunting return.

These intersections between the neo-Victorian and the Gothic serve to suggest that Kohlke and Gutleben are right in their claim that "*neo-Victorianism is by nature quintessentially Gothic*: resurrecting the ghost(s) of the past, searching out its dark secrets and shameful mysteries … [and] reliving the period's nightmares and traumas" ("(Mis)Shapes of Neo-Victorian Gothic" 4; original emphasis). Yet, according to this definition, the discourse of trauma in the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud and Abraham and Torok can also be seen as neo-Victorian. It too, as I will show, appears to find its methodology and its vocabulary in the Gothic texts of the nineteenth century in a self-conscious narrativisation of how the past returns to haunt. In the following section I propose that because psychoanalysis, like neo-Victorianism, "is by nature quintessentially Gothic", it is possible to use neo-Victorian fiction to shed light on the Gothic structures of the traumatised psyche, and the ways in which we approach and represent the past both individually and collectively.

In the Gothic drama of psychoanalysis, resolution or healing depends on the decrypting or decoding of language; psychoanalysis revels in the magic, or the uncanniness of language, in seeing words as crypts. The crypt becomes a model of the traumatised psyche, and figurative language and word associations become the allies of the analysand, who inters traumatic memories in the dark crypts of the psyche and carefully guards this secret from even himself. It is the task of the analyst to discover the site of burial and identify the crypt; like a gravedigger, the analyst works to decode meaning and therefore assist the analysand to reconstruct the original narrative. The psychoanalytic discourse thoroughly depends on Gothic tropes to articulate such psychic mechanisms. Indeed, from its earliest beginnings, when Freud's method emerged in the late Victorian period, it was a result of a growing fascination with, and fear of, inaccessible mental processes. These fears were most often articulated in Gothic literature, and Freud's own work drew heavily on such narratives to inform his psychoanalytic vocabulary, so that the Gothic is always already buried within the discourse and practice of psychoanalysis and its theoretical descendants. As Michelle Massé points out, "Freud and others in psychoanalysis' first generation drew upon literature both for examples of psychoanalytic insight and as prior statements of what they themselves were struggling to understand" (307). There is therefore a historical precedent for the ways in which literature can function as a "prior statement" of our understanding of the human mind and articulate the psychoanalytic narrative of trauma.

Psychoanalysis and the Gothic often are seen to shed light on each other because Freud makes significant use of what we can recognise as Gothic, or at least fantastically haunting narratives, as evidence for his theories. As Freud himself notes in his 1919 essay, "The Uncanny", "it would not surprise me to hear that psychoanalysis, which seeks to uncover [...] secret forces, had for this reason itself come to seem uncanny to many people" (150). The most striking example of this, of course, is his use of the "uncanny motif" of E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman" in "The Uncanny", in which this haunting figure, who "tears out children's eyes", is seen to stand for the primordial fear of castration or a loss of identity (136). In addition to this, however, we find reference to history, romance, and heroes in Freud's 1909 essay on "Family Romances" (39), the "eccentric" egos of the protagonists of "so-called psychological novels" (31) in "The Creative Writer and Daydreaming" (1907), as well as earlier references to the work of Shakespeare, and the classical legends. Freud was thus the first to identify how useful his work could be as a tool of literary analysis, even though it struck him as "strange" that his case histories can "read like short stories" (Freud, *Studies on Hysteria* 160).

Thus, the reason that psychoanalysis, as a methodology, has lent itself so easily to criticism of Gothic and neo-Victorian literature is that it is a literary descendent of the earlier genre; psychoanalysis increasingly uses a Gothic vocabulary. For Robert J.C. Young, this very model of interpretation is "tautological" because, he claims, "Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* was in fact itself a Gothic novel" (n.p.). Young argues that "Freud took the increasing psychological preoccupation of the gothic novel to its logical conclusion: instead of portraying the psychological through a fictional narrative, he wrote a novel that pretended to be a real work of scientific psychology" (n.p.). For Hélène Cixous, too, "The Uncanny" is "less a discourse than a strange theoretical novel" (525). Even though it might be the stuff of Gothic literature for psychoanalysis to propose that we are haunted by our past, that we harbour transferred and unrecognised guilt and family secrets, that desire rules us, that we fear the unfamiliar, and that our dreams figure coded messages, my reading of the psychoanalytic response to the Gothic is not intended to go this far. Ian Watt, for example, argues that "Freudian theory can itself be seen as a Gothic myth. It presents the individual, much as the gothic does, as essentially imprisoned by the tyranny of an omnipotent but unseen past" (qtd. in Kilgour 41). For William Patrick Day, moreover, psychoanalysis and the Gothic "are cousins, responses to the problems of selfhood and identity, sexuality and pleasure, fear and anxiety, as they manifest themselves in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (qtd. in Kilgour 41). But rather than asserting a definitional circularity here, as Young proposes, we should recognise psychoanalysis as an evolution of Gothic writing because it proposes a critical methodology for itself as a Gothic text, for understanding the Gothic structures of neo-Victorian fiction, and for understanding the significance of this genre for trauma theory.

Freud's early ideas presented in "The Creative Writer and Daydreaming", and "Screen Memories" (1899) are useful as demonstrations of what psychoanalysis does to the spectralised or Gothicised, highly anxious subject, whether that is a person or, here, a period or genre. More specifically, they help us to think about the problem of origins in psychoanalysis, and how this becomes connected to uncanny words, or language in trauma. In "Daydreaming", Freud explains that creative writing shares affinities with childhood play: "every child at play behaves like a writer, by creating a world of his own or, to put it more correctly, by imposing a new and more pleasing order on the things that make up his world" (25). For Massé, this means that "[d]reams and daydreams are stories written by ourselves for ourselves .... In literature, we weave the beautifully elaborated fabric of language that lets us

articulate what could not otherwise be known or said, not only for ourselves but for others also" (307). These characteristics are not, however, only true of the child or the creative writer: the analysand, too, has imposed "a new and more pleasing order on the things that make up his world" through a process of repression that transposes and resituates meaning.

This is precisely what happens in neo-Victorian fiction, according to the critical interpretation which sees the neo-Victorian as a "stage-set". "To be an adult", then, says Massé, "is to know the distinction between fantasy and reality, passionate longings and pragmatic limitation. And yet, as adults we give up nothing of infantile wishes: we simply become more cautious, more crafty in shaping those early desires into forms that are acceptable to ourselves, and which may even be applauded by our societies" (307). The imagination, according to Freud, in writing or in play, seeks "compensation" for life's "impoverishment" in the "sphere of fiction" (Freud, "Timely Reflections" 185). This idea appears in a slightly different form in Freud's proposition of "screen memories", false or constructed memories which protect a true but traumatic childhood memory, and which through a process of association can be traced back to the originary experience, or combination of experiences. This resonates with the Victorian-born Elizabeth Bowen, who calls screen memory, "fictitious memory", or the "overlapping and haunting of life by fiction", and asserts that "I know that I have in my make-up layers of synthetic experience, and that the most powerful of my memories are only half true" (48). For her, it is the early experience of purely sensational reading which fills in where the "insufficiency of so-called real life" leaves off, because literature, when one is a child, performs a kind of "magic" (49). Once we grow up, however, this magic is lost, because we must, cannot help but, "read [with] the brain"; "[t]he only above-board grown-up children's stories", she says, "are detective stories" (50), because these retain that magic.

This is important because the role that both the psychoanalyst and the literary critic play is, essentially, the detective (Kilgour 41-42). For example, in "Screen Memories", the analyst "character" asserts to his patient:

> You projected the two fantasies on to one another and turned them into a childhood memory. So the feature of the Alpine flowers is, so to speak, the date-mark for its construction. I can assure you that such things are very often constructed unconsciously – almost like works of fiction. (14)

Psychoanalysis uses the language of the Gothic, it seems, to point to a "pre-hysteric" state, but in doing so, it reveals its desire for resolution. In this case, the cryptic depths reach an end point. Psychoanalysis is thus a kind of detective Gothic in which the grown-up's story or drama of childhood is decoded; the psychoanalyst or critic solves the mystery when he or she recognises the cryptic words of the Gothicised analysand (whether person or text), who is both victim and perpetrator of the secret "crime".

However, "The Uncanny" undermines this central project of resolution in psychoanalysis, not least because "uncanny" is the quintessential magic word, producing a kind of ghostly or unfamiliarity effect as the repetition of the word in the extensive etymological section of that essay shows how traumatic language can become more and more strangely, cryptically, empty, rather than full, of meaning. As in neo-Victorian fiction, therefore, psychoanalysis approaches the fundamental aporia of trauma theory: the tension between "discovering" a secret and recognising it as always already unknowable or unrepresentable. This comparison of psychoanalysis and the neo-Victorian Gothic enables us to see an important point that neo-Victorian fiction is trying to make, and is an important reminder for trauma theorists: that is, it is not possible to fully know the past, especially when that past is traumatic. Indeed, it is

only through an acceptance of this uncertainty that the future becomes free of the after-effects of trauma.

Belatedness and Haunting: Neo-Victorian Ethics

Contemporary trauma theory is often explained by what Freud termed the *Nachträglichkeit*, usually translated as "afterwardsness", "belatedness" or "deferred action". It refers to the sense in which trauma is not strictly known or experienced at the time of its occurrence, but only later, once it is remembered, or returns. In Cathy Caruth's terms, then, "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). However, readings of the *Nachträglichkeit* tend to see its representation of traumatic structures to license a simple association of the unknown past interrupting the present – once the traumatic event is "known" (or experienced as if for the first time), it is narrativised, deciphered, worked through, and resolved, and the trauma ceases to have a hold over the psychic life of the traumatised subject. However, neither *Nachträglichkeit* nor the neo-Victorian is best understood simply as a desire to return to the past, because that past is always already understood as a "stage-set". In Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* (1987), for instance, magic realism is used to underscore this fictionalisation: these versions of the past are always shown to be performance. Moreover, as both narratives progress they become increasingly fragmented, as if to convey the impossibility of conveying the traumatic memory as ever whole or certain. To be sure, the narrative and temporal structures of trauma are more complicated than simple return: the *Nachträglichkeit* depicts trauma as "always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language" (Caruth 4). Justin Sausman has previously suggested that neo-Victorian fiction, "as a belated literary mode that returns to the nineteenth century with the knowledge conferred by hindsight, would seem to exemplify Freud's logic of *Nachträglichkeit*" (119). He has also drawn out some of the complications to this model the genre provides, concluding that "whereas the traumatised subject is condemned to a repetition of the same set of pathological symptoms until released through narrativising the repressed event, neo-Victorian fiction can be read as a self-conscious investigation of these symptoms, appearing as both victim and analyst of its own traumatic traces' (Sausman 119). Part of the traumatic effect created by the neo-Victorian, indeed, lies in its ability to both describe and perform the logic of the *Nachträglichkeit*, because the *Nachträglichkeit* simultaneously testifies to the known and to the unknown, figuring a tension between the two.

In a similar approach to the spectrality or Gothicism inherent in neo-Victorian fiction, Pulham and Arias (xvi-xix) have described the ways in which it can be read as a model of what Davis terms "the two strands of hauntology, deriving from Abraham and Torok and from Derrida" (379). These "strands" recognise the significance of the ghost, first for an understanding of trauma, and second as a model of the operation of literature in the world. The difference in the two readings, Davis posits, lies in what Derrida terms the "spectre", and what Abraham and Torok call "the phantom" (376-77). The latter figures trauma's unspeakability in terms of a desire to hide or bury the shameful secret – such secrets, however, "can and should be put into words so that the phantom and its noxious effects on the living can be exorcised" (Davis 379). Derrida's spectre, on the other hand, maintains the inherent secrecy of the secret: "Derrida wants to avoid any such restoration and to encounter what is strange, unheard, *other*, about the ghost" (Davis 379; original emphasis). For Derrida,

the traumatic memory can never be known, and only maintaining that secrecy in narrative would constitute an ethical representation of the psyche's traumatic structures. While for Pulham and Arias these two figurations of spectrality testify to the way in which "literature is permanently haunted by ghosts, revenants and spirits which travel across time and make an appearance in the form of textual/spectral traces" (xix), I propose that we must recognise neo-Victorian fiction not as simply "haunted", but as performing an ethical maintenance of the secrecy or Otherness of the traumatic past as ghost. In the sense that it addresses the *performed* Victorian, the "stage-set", the neo-Victorian always already acknowledges the past as wholly inaccessible.

My point, then, is that the neo-Victorian approaches the Victorian as something that is not truly known, and as a trauma that can never be resolved. We have not, Heilmann and Llewellyn point out, "been able to bring the Victorian narrative to a conclusion yet" (27), precisely because it enacts an inability to conclude. Neo-Victorian writing constructs the traumatic past as that which must remain Other, but more than this, and importantly for trauma theory, it accepts it as such. If, as Caruth proposes, "For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence" (18), then it might be seen that the neo-Victorian construction and acceptance of the traumatic past in this way constitutes an ethical response to that trauma, an understanding of its unspeakability and rendering of it only in those terms. The neo-Victorian listens to the spectre without seeking to reduce it to the known, and in this way "open[s] us up to the experience of secrecy as such" (Davis 377).

This essay has developed the recent debates about the significance of spectrality and haunting in neo-Victorian writing by suggesting that it offers an important model to trauma theory. Despite being "about" history, works of neo-Victorian fiction do not seem to signify a desire to truly understand the past – indeed, they suggest that such a task is impossible. Rather, such works demonstrate an awareness of that which exceeds our seeing or knowing in both the present and the past. By formalising this as a mode of narrative, and recognising its similarities to the psychoanalytic discourse of trauma, neo-Victorian fiction can be seen to figure an ethical representation of the structures of traumatic history and memory, and shows how we might write trauma in ways that do not have to constitute narrativisation or "working through", and which therefore still depend on an absolute sense of historical knowing.

Notes

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[2] Historiographic metafiction, Linda Hutcheon explains, refers to works of historical fiction which has "its historical and socio-political grounding sit uneasily alongside its self-reflexivity" (14), and is therefore "self-conscious about the paradox of the totalizing yet inevitably partial act of narrative representation" (75).

[3] See also, for example, Heilmann and Llewellyn (144-48); Funk (151-52); and Kohlke and Gutleben, "(Mis)Shapes of the Neo-Victorian Gothic" (1-49).

[4] See, for example, Widdowson (496); McWilliam (112); and Birch (144-45).

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